SOWCHEA BAY
PROVINCIAL PARK
MASTER PLAN

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R.L. HEATHMAN
PARKS BRANCH
MAY, 1979

105-03378/

Province of British Columbia
Ministry of Recreation and Conservation
PARKS BRANCH

MEMORANDUM

Ministry of Lands, Parks & Housing

To Mr. T.O. Moore
Regional Manager
Omineca-Peace Region

IN REPLYING PLEASE REFER TO:
FILE NO. 1-4-5-61

June 5, 1979

Submitted herewith is the first draft original of Sowchea Bay Provincial Park Master Plan for your perusal.

Representing the collective thinking of Regional and District staff, it is an analysis of park resources and a presentation of resource management, operations and development policy.

It is recommended by the undersigned that the plan be submitted to the executive for review and approval in principle.

R.L. Heatham
Master Planner

RLH/jw

Recommended: _____ June 5/79
District Superintendent Date

Recommended: _____ June 6/79
Regional Planner Date

Approved: _____ July 5/79
Regional Manager Date

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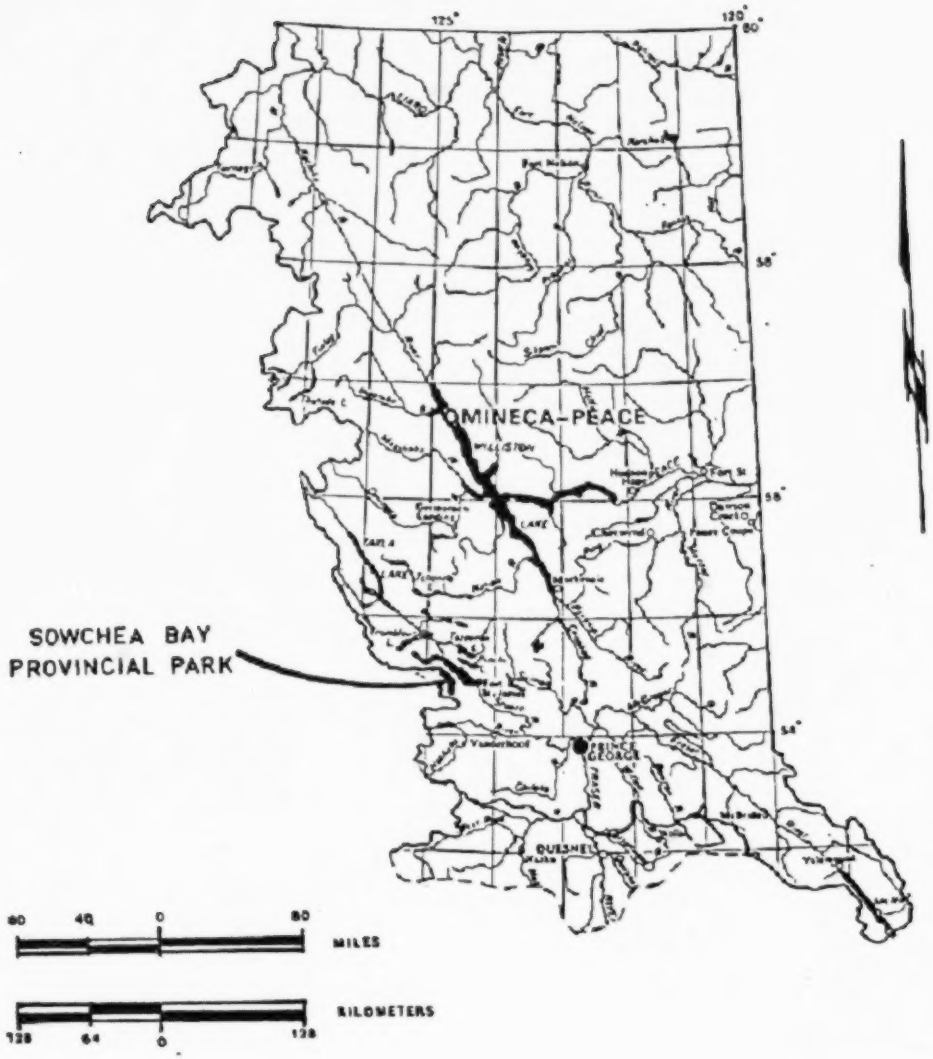
PARK LOCATION



I. INTRODUCTION

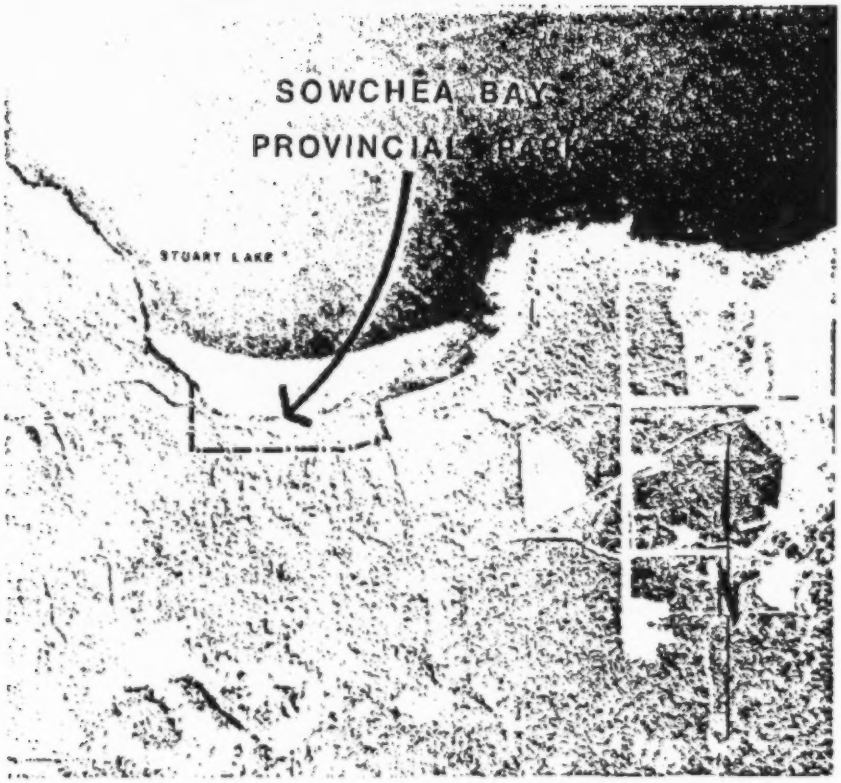
A. BACKGROUND

Sowchea Bay Provincial Park, located approximately eleven kilometers west of Fort St. James, provides an opportunity to develop a superb lakeshore camping facility. Since the park is situated only three kilometers past Parrens Beach Provincial Park - the principle day use park in the area - campsite development here will complete a range of facilities offered by the Parks Branch in the area. Proposed development is planned to take maximum advantage of the site through high density, standard campsite development. Approximately fifty campsite units are planned.

Although only 7.6 hectares in size, the land base is almost ideal for park development. A broad sand beach, flat lying topography, well drained sandy soils and an attractive mix of deciduous and coniferous tree cover make the site extremely attractive for recreational use.

Originally, the park was a recreation reserve administered by the Forest Service and was used primarily by the local and regional populace. Recently, a lack of tourist accommodation brought on by the development of Fort St. James National Historic Park was identified by the local Chamber of Commerce and this led to a directive by Government to establish and develop the area as a Provincial Park and Campground.

Completion of this facility will alleviate tourist accommodation problems in the area and provide a valuable addition to the parks and recreation system of northern British Columbia.


SOWCHEA BAY
PROVINCIAL PARK
STUART LAKE

B. PURPOSE OF THIS PLAN

To prepare guidelines for recreational development that will:

i. ensure maintenance of a quality park environment;

ii. direct development to compliment recreational capabilities of the land base and serve local and regional requirements.

C. MARKET

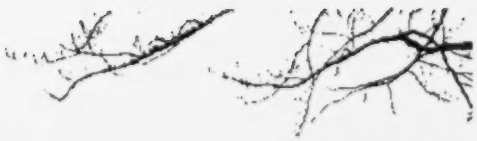
During the months of June, July, August and September over 6,800 people visit Fort St. James National Historic Park. At an average of 3.3 people per group approximately 2080 parties visit the park during the course of the summer months. This is an average of 130 parties per week. While not all of these visitors will stay overnight, it is considered that a high proportion of them will use campgrounds in the area.

Additionally, use statistics gathered at the Forest Service campsite at Sowchea Bay indicate that in 1978, 5,885 visitors used the site. Up to 58 recreational vehicles have been counted there at one time and apparently most of these users are locals, from the Fort St. James - Vanderhoof area. It is anticipated that the majority of use will continue to be from the local 8,000 plus population in and around the two communities. It is further expected that the park will be filled to capacity on weekends and from 20% to 40% full on summer week days. A continuous high level of use is not expected here since the park is far off Highway 16, the major tourist artery.

There are two private campgrounds, one on Stuart Lake and one on Stuart River, containing 16 and 22 units respectively. It is not known what impacts development of a campsite at Sowchea Bay will have on these operations.

The property has been operated as a forest service recreation site for many years. Vegetative cover has been destroyed in some areas due to unregulated use.

Although the property has a northerly aspect, with proper tree thinning, sunlight will penetrate to most areas along the beach.



II. BIOPHYSICAL RESOURCES

A. CLIMATE

The park is situated with a similar aspect and elevation as nearby Parrens Beach Provincial Park and recreational pursuits appropriate to the climate of Parrens Beach are thus appropriate here. Swimming, sunbathing, picnicking, camping, fishing, and associated lake oriented activities will be the main opportunities provided for.

Mean daily maximum temperatures for July and August is approximately 20^0 C. Measurable rain falls approximately 10 days per month throughout the summer period and the area receives approximately 75 frost free days per year.

B. GEOLOGY AND SOILS

Bedrock controlled glacial activity is the main formative agent for the physiography of the Stuart Lake area. Stuart Lake lies atop one of the major fault zones of the province. Known as the Pinchi Lake fault, it stretches from the Spatsizi Plateau south to the Horsefly River, a distance of 560 kilometers.

During the last ice age, southeasterly moving glaciers following this fault zone gouged deeply into the bedrock forming the lake chain of Takla, Trembleur and Stuart Lakes. At least two seperate advances of the Omineca ice sheet eroded these valleys to considerable depths and the landforms visible today are largely the erosional or depositional products of the last ice advance. The area forming the south end of Stuart Lake is filled with unconsolidated sands and gravels, interspersed with bedrock outcrops, as a result of outwash from a very large glacier.

Sowchea Bay Provincial Park appears to have been formed as a result of two later factors acting on this outwash material. Small creeks in the area carried fairly well sorted material to lake level, depositing it in a broad flat area at the end of Stuart Lake. Strong wave action from the northwest sorted this material and carried sands along the shore, adding to this deposit. As the lake level slowly receded a flat beach terrace with a fine sand frontage was left.

The soils of the park are thus well drained and resistant to compaction, but somewhat erodable if vegetative cover is removed.

C. FLORA

The area falls within what is known as the sub-boreal spruce biogeoclimatic zone, according to the Krajina system. However. the vegetative community within this park does not appear to typify this zone. Large, douglas fir, unusually far north and usually associated with the Cariboo-Aspen-Douglas fir zone, are to be found within the park. The tree community consists of a mix of cottonwood, trembling aspen, lodgepole pine, paper birch and fir. Much of the shrub community is formed by wild rose and willow.

D. FAUNA

Because of the small land area of the park, most larger mammals found are only passing through it as part of their range. Of the larger mammals found in the area, moose and deer are probably the most obvious. Because of the parks favorable aspect and vegetative cover, it is used to a small extent as moose winter range.

Coyotes, porcupines, the occasional black bear, and wolf, pass through the park.

The lake supports a wide variety of fish, the most important being a major sockeye run. Rainbow trout to twenty pounds, lake char to twenty pounds, kokanee, burbot, and sturgeon support a fine recreational fishery.

Many species of coarse fish are found within the lake as well.

Beach frontage is excellent. The shallow waters of the bay warm in summer making this one of the best swimming beaches in the area. View looking east toward summer cabins.

View looking west. Park boundary meets shore near the bedrock outcrop at right.

8

The upland of Sowchea Bay is generally flat and well drained. However, a small creek and a bedrock outcropping effectively reduce the usable area to approximately 5 hectares.

This necessitates the relocation of the main road outside the park boundaries to take maximum advantage of space.

III. PARK POLICY

A. PARK ROLE

The role of Sowchea Bay will be to complete the range of Parks Branch services offered in the Fort St. James area of Stuart Lake through provision of vehicle camping opportunities.

B. OBJECTIVES

a) Recreation Objective

The primary recreation objective is to provide lakeshore oriented camping facilities for use by tourists visiting Fort St. James.

b) Natural History Objective

The small size and disturbed cover of Sowchea Bay Park indicates that it is not significant in fulfilling provincial natural history objectives.

C. RECREATION MANAGEMENT

a) Capacity

The park will consist of a fifty unit standard design campground. At 3.3 people per vehicle, it will have a design capacity of 165 people.

b) Camper Management

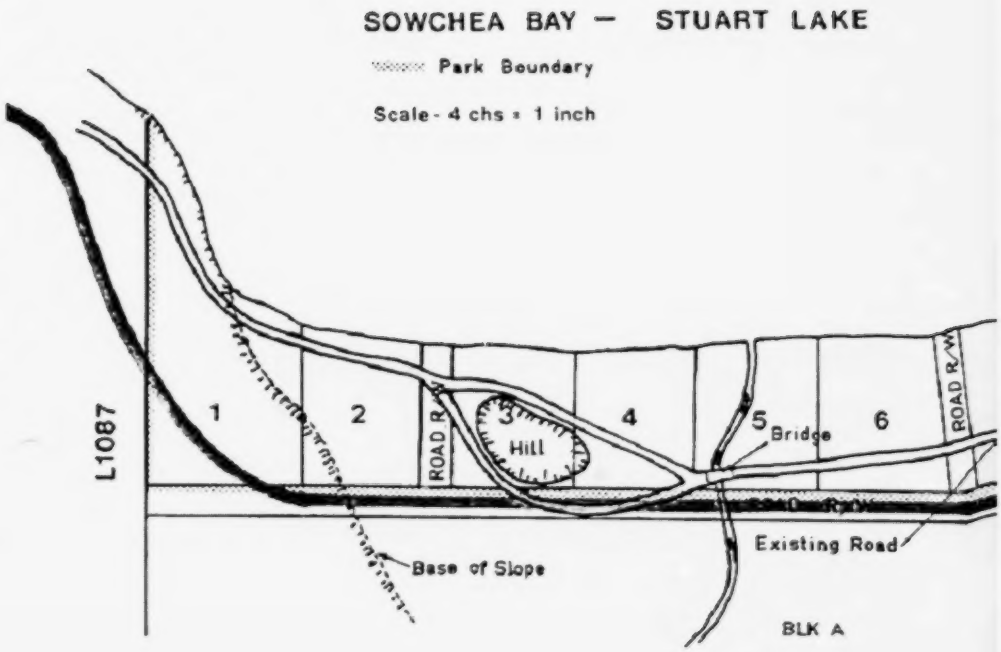
Camping will be restricted to designated sites only. Unrestricted camping will not be permitted elsewhere in the park to ensure fire protection. Overflow camping will be directed to the day use parking lots at Parrens Beach Provincial Park.

c) Fee Policy

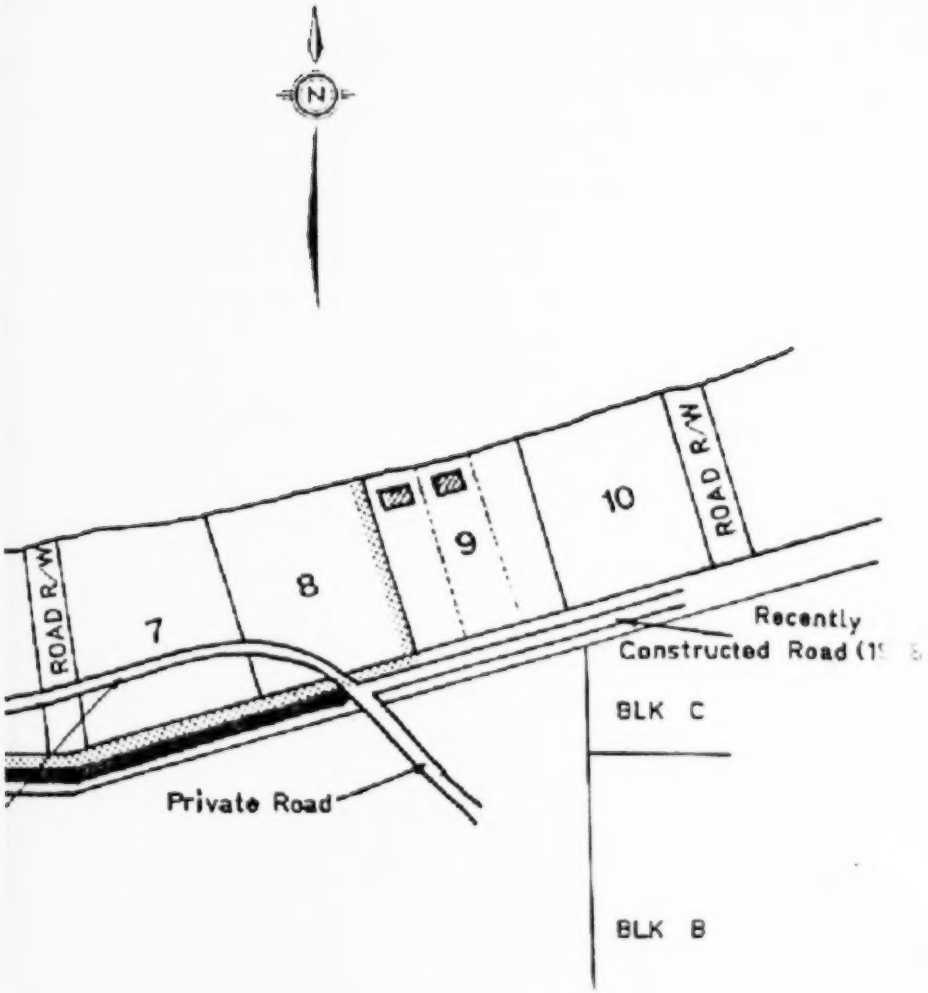
Fees will be charged for overnight use of the campground when it is completed. Collection methods will be determined by prevailing Parks Branch Policy.

d) Access

The Ministry of Highways will maintain the access road passing the south boundary of the park. Access to the park will be restricted at night and during the off season. Snow will not be plowed within the park during winter.



In order to take advantage of all usable land the existing access road will be relocated to within the right-of-way denoted on the subdivision plan above. The new road location is shown in brown and will cost approximately $40,000.00 to construct. It will be necessary to negotiate a new crossing of Lot 1087, which is private land, as part of this procedure. When the road is completed it will be established as a highway right-of-way and maintenance will become a Ministry of Highways responsibility.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ROAD R/W
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ROAD R/W
Recently
Constructed Road (1
BLK C
Private Road
BLK B

A small boat drop off area will be constructed for the convenience of campers. Those visitors with larger boats will be expected to launch at Parrens Beach Park.

e) **Hunting**

Hunting, and the general discharge of firearms will be prohibited in Sowchea Bay Provincial Park.

f) **Fishing**

Regulations governing the control of fishing will remain entirely a Fish and Wildlife Branch responsibility. No specific provisions will be made for fishing within the park.

g) **Interpretation**

With the possible exception of a self interpretive trail, no provision for interpretive facilities will be made at Sowchea Bay Park.

D. RESOURCE MANAGEMENT POLICY

Resource management policy within Sowchea Bay Provincial Park will ensure that natural processes are permitted to evolve within the constraints of protection of public safety and protection of the park's physical and aesthetic resources.

a) **Water**

The Parks Branch will ensure that recreational use of the site will not contribute to deterioration of water quality. All toilets will be pump-out vaults to be emptied on an as needed basis.

b) **Land**

The park is free of all private inholdings. The Highways right-of-way through the west end of the park will be established under the Highways Act, and removed from the park. Pursuant to the Park Act, no alienation of land will be permitted.

c) **Forest Management**

Forest will be managed for recreation purposes. Within this small area it will be necessary to control the destructive forces of disease, fire and infestation.

Disease and infestation control will be permitted in circumstances where maintenance of healthy stands is fundamental to protecting important aesthetic qualities or public safety. Wild fires will be extinguished outright.

E. PARK MANAGEMENT AND STAFFING

a) Staffing

The park will be operated as a satellite of Parrens Beach Provincial Park. Auxiliary staff, based at a service yard to be established there will direct and control recreational use, operations and maintenance of the park.

Auxiliary staff will be recruited from the local populace and the point of assembly will be at Parrens Beach. No residence will be constructed on site.

It is estimated that the campground will require 8 man-months of auxiliary staff time over a four month operating period.

b) Water Supply

Drinking water will be supplied by hand pumps and drilled wells.

c) Firewood Supply

Mill ends, hauled from Fort St. James under contract, will be the sole source of firewood supplied and will be delivered to centralized woodlots. Firewood will not normally be cut from within the boundaries of this small park.

d) Sanitary Facilities

All toilets will consist of pump-out vaults. Effluent will be removed under contract from Fort St. James or Vanderhoof. Garbage facilities will be centralized.

F. PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

The plan will be implemented in one phase. A design request and preliminary cost estimates are attached. Total cost for this project is estimated at $192,000.00.

DESIGN REQUEST

PROJECT NAME: Sowchea Bay Campground

LOCATION: On the South end of Stuart Lake approximately 10 miles west of Fort St. James.

- No surveyed mapping available, sketch plan only. Topographical mapping to be undertaken as soon as weather permits.

PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION: The local M.L.A. and the Fort St. James Chamber of Commerce have identified that there is need of camping facilities near Fort St. James to accommodate tourists coming to visit Fort St. James National Historic Park. They feel that a campground will provide a valuable public convenience. Use statistics indicate appropriate scale or capacity of camping requirements to be approximately 50 units. There is a distinct possibility that the project will be implemented in the coming season. It is therefore apparent that a design must be prepared as soon as possible in the spring.

CONCEPT: To provide a lakeshore recreation development suitable for overnight use by the touring public. Fishing, swimming, picnicking and camping will be the main recreational activities provided for. This concept is not related to either a Park Plan or Interim Policy Statement since the land base has not yet been established as a park. The development itself will be the justification for Provincial Park status at this site.

PROPOSED ACTIONS:

A. Create a design with the following components:

1. Relocate Access Road - The present access road takes up valuable

land within the proposed boundaries. It will be re- located to conform with the surveyed right-of-way along the south boundary of the property line. A single entrance road will be constructed into the development in order to restrict access to one point.

2. Camping Area - The campsites will consist of individual pads of standard design. The pads will be lake-oriented with a table and fireplace on each pad. Density will be dictated by the desired capacity of approximately 50 units.

3. Tenting Area - To consist of approximately 10 pads with sand bases, and with a configuration suitable for group use.

B. Furniture to be provide shall generally be of Type II Standard:
- tables, Type II
- 2 cord firewood/garbage can corrals with lids, Type II, Drawing A-5-8
- circular fireplace rings
- information shelter
- entrance sign
- pump-out pit toilets
- hand pump and well

C. The park will be maintained from a base at Parrens Beach Provincial Park. As part of this development, a service base will be constructed at Parrens Beach Park. From here, daily maintenance and operations will occur. Design will include a single door, 2 bay garage and a service yard with chain link fence.

DESIGN CONSTRAINTS: A buffer of undeveloped land will be left at the east end of the park between the campground and the summer cabins. A 4 foot chain link fence will run the length of the east boundary between the cabins and the campsites. A small creek must be bridged in order to make best use of the property.

COSTS: Approximately $ 192,000.00

RECOMMENDED:

G. MacDonald — District Superintendent — Feb 21, 1979 — Date

K. L. Watt — Master Planner — Feb 21/1979 — Date

APPROVED:

Donald Macaulay — Regional Planner — Feb. 21/79 — Date

RLH/mk

cc: B. Price
cc: G. MacDonald